Happy Valentine's

A one-act play

From us to you

Happy Valentine’s

By Ek Noor

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Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to real people, families, or places is purely coincidental.

Character List:

NIKKI: Female, mid 40s, married to PAUL, and of Desi heritage.

PAUL: Male, white British, mid 40s, married to NIKKI.

RAJ: Mid 40s, Desi heritage. Married to SONIA.

SONIA: Late 30s, wife of RAJ and of Desi heritage.

WAITER: Young man.

Desi is a colloquial term used by South Asians to describe themselves and their culture, especially in diaspora communities.

Scene One: Two Tables

A restaurant. Valentine's evening. Soft music. Two tables, some distance apart, both visible to the audience.

Lights on **NIKKI and PAUL**.

Table One: Nikki & Paul

NIKKI: Do you remember Simon as a baby? I swear he knew when I went to bed.

PAUL: *(laughing)* That child had timing. Olympic standards.

NIKKI: And you...so proud..."I'll do the nappies at night."

PAUL: You were breastfeeding. It felt… unfair otherwise.

NIKKI: Unfair? You changed nappies like it was a competitive sport.

PAUL: I was exhausted. But weirdly happy.

NIKKI: We were zombies.

PAUL: Yes, proper...zombies.

(They laugh. A shared, easy laugh.)

NIKKI: You'd finish a nappy, hold him, and whisper like you were persuading him.

PAUL: I thought if I sounded calm, he might believe me.

NIKKI: And then you'd fall asleep sitting up.

PAUL: Briefly. Until you nudged me and said, "Your turn again."

(They clink glasses.)

PAUL: I don't miss the sleep deprivation.

NIKKI: I miss how we were in it together.

(A beat. Comfortable.)

(Lights slowly shift to the second table.)

Table Two: Sonia & Raj

RAJ: After Amar was born, I barely slept.

SONIA: *(startled)* Oh...yes. I know.

RAJ: Very difficult. Going into work like that. Meetings. Decisions.

SONIA: I'm sorry. *(quickly)* I tried to keep him quiet at night.

RAJ: Well. You did what you could.

SONIA: I was breastfeeding… and changing him… and then going to work part-time…

RAJ: Yes, yes. *(a small nod)* Of course you performed your role well.

(Sonia smiles faintly, relieved.)

SONIA: I’m glad.

RAJ: It’s important. Stability. Everyone knowing what they’re responsible for.

(A pause.)

SONIA: You were very tired.

RAJ: Exactly.

(He takes a sip of water. Sonia adjusts her napkin.)

(Lights widen briefly so both tables are visible at once. Nikki and Paul are laughing softly again. Sonia and Raj sit in silence.)

Blackout

Scene Two: Ordering Food

Lights on both tables again. Menus are studied by both couples. The WAITER approaches NIKKI and *PAUL first.*

Table One: Nikki & Paul

WAITER: Good evening. Are you ready to order?

PAUL: Yes...absolutely. What are you having?

NIKKI: *(still reading)* I want the lamb. And the chocolate thing. I’ve already decided about the chocolate thing.

PAUL: That was fast.

NIKKI: I'm better at reading than you. *(both laugh).*

PAUL: I was thinking fish… but now I want what you're having.

NIKKI: You always do this.

PAUL: Because you order well.

NIKKI: Fine. We'll share.

PAUL: Perfect.

WAITER: Any starters?

NIKKI: Do we need starters?

PAUL: No. *(a beat)* Yes.

NIKKI: Two starters. We'll have the soup.

PAUL: Two.

(They smile at each other.)

(Lights slide to SONIA and RAJ. *The* WAITER *moves smoothly across.)*

Table Two: Sonia & Raj

WAITER: Good evening.

RAJ: Yes. We'll order.

(Sonia straightens.)

RAJ: *(to waiter)* She'll have the chicken.

SONIA: I...*(a pause)* Yes. The chicken.

WAITER: And for you, sir?

RAJ: The steak. Medium. *(A beat.)* No starters.

SONIA: I could share something…

RAJ: It's heavy food. Best to be sensible.

SONIA: Of course.

WAITER: Any dessert later?

RAJ: We'll see.

(The waiter nods.)

(Both tables visible.)

(The WAITER *passes between the tables.)*

WAITER: Happy Valentine's Day.

(A beat.)

NIKKI & PAUL: Oh...Thank you! *(They laugh.)*

RAJ: We don’t really do Valentine’s.

WAITER: Of course.

(The waiter exits.)

(Lights dim slightly, Nikki tastes Paul’s drink. Sonia watches Raj sip his.)

Blackout

Scene Three: Valentine’s Day

Lights on both tables, mid-meal. Glasses half-full. A small red candle is placed on each table by the WAITER.

Table One: Nikki & Paul

PAUL: *(eyeing the candle)* Oh no.

NIKKI: What?

PAUL: They’ve noticed us.

NIKKI: We were doing so well.

PAUL: Quick. Pretend like it’s our first date.

(They both lean in theatrically. Then laugh.)

NIKKI: I love your cheeky Valentine's cards.

PAUL: Yours are always funnier.

NIKKI: It's just a laugh *(giggles)*

PAUL: *(giggles)* It keeps us young.

(They clink glasses.)

(Lights drift to Table Two.*)*

Table Two: Sonia & Raj

RAJ: *(frowning at the candle)* Did you ask for this?

SONIA: No.

RAJ: Neither did I.

(A pause.)

SONIA: It's Valentine's Day.

RAJ: Yes. *(dismissive)* Restaurants make a big deal of it, to make more money.

SONIA: Some people like it.

RAJ: It's very commercial.

SONIA: Of course.

(Sonia adjusts the candle slightly, then stops herself.)

(Lights on both tables.)

NIKKI: *(laughing)* Do you remember our first Valentine's

PAUL: I cooked.

NIKKI: Burnt pasta.

PAUL: Intentionally. Lowered expectations early.

NIKKI: It worked.

(They smile.)

RAJ: *(quietly, to Sonia)* We never needed days like this.

SONIA: No.

RAJ: We're practical people.

SONIA: Yes.

WAITER: Just to let you know, we have a special Valentine's dessert. To share.

PAUL: Oh.

NIKKI: Tempting.

PAUL: Very.

NIKKI: We'll think about it.

PAUL: We will absolutely not think about it and then say, yes.

(They grin.)

RAJ: No dessert.

WAITER: Of course.

(The waiter exits.)

Blackout

Scene Four: The Empty Table

The restaurant is quieter now. NIKKI and PAUL'S table is empty. Plates cleared. The small red candle still burns. SONIA looks at the empty chairs where NIKKI and PAUL were sitting.

(A pause.)

SONIA: They looked… happy.

(A beat.)

SONIA: Do you think they're happier?

RAJ: *(measured)* It's different for them.

SONIA: Different how?

RAJ: Different culture. Different expectations. *(A beat.)* You can’t compare.

(Sonia nods, as if accepting this.)

SONIA: *(Then, quietly)* She’s like us though.

RAJ: *(firmer, closing it down)* Not really.

(RAJ picks up his coat. SONIA looks once more at the empty table. At the chair NIKKI sat on.)

(A pause.)

SONIA: Yes.

(They stand. Raj walks ahead. Sonia follows.)

Blackout.